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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 000659

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DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR IO A/S BRIMMER
P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER
NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT
DOD/OSD FOR FLOURNOY/KAHL/DALTON
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: AOUN RE-EMERGES, DEMANDING PROPORTIONAL
CABINET SHARE

REF: BEIRUT 654

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Following his Change and Reform parliamentary bloc's June 10 meeting and in his first public appearance since the June 7 parliamentary elections, MP Michel Aoun announced that if there is a national unity government, his parliamentary bloc would expect a share of seats proportional to its representation in parliament, six or seven in a 30-member cabinet. Aoun noted that he supports giving the President the blocking minority in the new cabinet if the constitution is amended to reflect this, rather than it being negotiated with each new cabinet. He also stated that his bloc will contest the victory by two March 14 candidates in the Metn district (Aoun won six seats there). Aoun's ally in Zahle may contest March 14's sweep of seven seats there. Aounist MPs urged to DCM that the United States "turn the page" on its distant relationship with Aoun. End summary.

AOUN WANTS 7 OUT
OF 30 MINISTERS

2. (SBU) MP Michel Aoun's Change and Reform parliamentary bloc convened June 10, the first time following the June 7 elections. Aoun's bloc now consists of 27 MPs including Marada party leader and newly-elected MP Suleiman Franjieh and head of the Lebanese Democratic party, Druze MP Talal Arslan.

3. (SBU) During a televised interview following the meeting, Aoun's first public appearance since the June 7 parliamentary elections, he stated that while the opposition did not win the majority, "It still maintains the popular majority" and will "insist their participation in the government should be based on proportional representation."

4. (SBU) Aoun clarified that if there is a national unity government, his parliamentary bloc would expect a share of seats proportional to its representation in parliament, six

or seven in a 30-member cabinet. (Note: Aoun has five ministers in the current cabinet. End note.) He added that since he represents 50 percent of the Christian votes, he is entitled to 50 percent of the Christian ministers in cabinet (or one-fourth of the cabinet, which must be split equally between Muslims and Christians). Aoun supported giving the President authority to name some members of the cabinet, but said the constitution must be amended to reflect a set number for the president, rather than it being negotiated at each time. Furthermore, Sleiman's seats should come from all confessions, rather than just Christians.

WILL CHALLENGE
MURR'S ELECTION

¶5. (C) Aoun said his bloc will contest election results in one district before the Constitutional Council, accusing MP Michel Murr of intimidation and threat in the Metn district. (Note: Aoun was referring to the June 7 video broadcast on his OTV network showing Murr threatening Syriac Orthodox priest Elias Akkary with the help of armed supporters of his son, Defense Minister Elias Murr. Michel Murr was allied with Aoun until 2008, but ran against him in this election. End note.) We also have heard that an opposition MP in Zahle may contest March 14's sweep of that district's seven seats.

PREFERS SINIORA,
OVER SAAD, AS NEXT PM

¶6. (SBU) Asked if his bloc will vote for Speaker Nabih Berri to retain his speaker position, Aoun replied, "Is there any other candidate? If there is another, we will see." As for the premiership, if he had to choose between Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and majority leader Saad Hariri, Aoun answered, "I prefer the original one (Hariri), why accept the fake one (Siniora)?" Comment: there seems to be wide acceptance among opposition figures that Saad should be PM. End comment

AOUN MP'S URGE U.S. TO
"TURN THE PAGE" WITH AOUN

¶7. (C) DCM met June 11-12 with four Aounist MPs who won election. One, Ibrahim Kanaan, said his personal view is that Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement deputies should not join the new cabinet. Instead, he argued, March 14 should be accountable for governing themselves and not be able to use the excuse, as they have up until now, that the opposition's presence in the cabinet has blocked progress on issues. According to Kanaan, President Sleiman is damaged following his well-known support for opponents of Aoun who either lost or did poorer than expected.

¶8. (C) Kanaan and MP Farid el-Khazen urged that the United States "turn the page" on its distant relationship with Aoun. They argued that Aoun showed again his strength among Lebanese Christians in the election, has no intention of trying to remove President Sleiman so that Aoun can become president and supports many reforms the United States should support, such as anti-corruption measures.

¶9. (C) In a separate meeting with Pol/Off, Aoun press advisor May Akl admitted that the FPM had lost some Christian support because of its allegiance with Hizballah. Suggesting that Aoun himself felt the same way, Akl said the FPM had not gotten much out of its alliance and felt Hizballah needed to do more to support its Christian ally. Echoing MP Kanaan's complaints, she said Hariri was being hypocritical by using the Aoun-Hizballah alliance to scare Christian voters pre-elections, but now that he has won, he is extending a hand to the group. Akl suggested that if FPM did not get his "fair share" in the cabinet, the FPM might decide not to participate in the government. She also relayed that the FPM would fight to keep Aoun advisor and son-in-law Gebran Bassil, who failed to secure an MP seat in Batroun, as

Telecom Minister.

SULEIMAN FRANJIEH

¶10. (C) Meanwhile, advisors to opposition Christian Marada leader Suleiman Franjeh Rony Arayji and Richard Haykal were clearly happy with Marada's newly-won three seats (all in Zgharta) in parliament. In a June 11 meeting with Pol/Econ Chief and Senior LES Political Advisor, they admitted that Franjeh's list won by a narrow margin, but attributed this to vote buying and expatriate votes, some using illegal ID. Nationally, they viewed the electoral results as a loss for the Patriarch, President Sleiman, and the United States, which they accused of hedging its bets on the creation of an independent bloc close to the President.

¶11. (C) The advisors confirmed that Marada would be part of Aoun's bloc and would follow his lead on cabinet formation. Asked if Marada was seeking a Ministry, they said it was up to Aoun. Haykal (an AmCit and Vice President of AmCham) argued that Marada's participation in the next government also would depend on the government program, which he argued should clearly lay out a road map to implement political and economic reforms, a reference to the National Dialogue, and a commitment to increasing the powers of the President. He also insisted that all sensitive issues, including Hizballah's arms but also issues like a new electoral law, be discussed first in the Dialogue, rather than the cabinet or parliament. (Haykal's boss Franjeh will be a new participant in the Dialogue as a result of his electoral

victory.)

COMMENT

¶12. (C) The comments by Aoun's and Franjeh's advisors indicate the Christian opposition's demands, more than those of Hizballah, may cause delay in cabinet formation. While Hizballah's interest lies more in preserving the blocking third to protect its arms, Aoun's motivation is pure power, and ensuring that he receives the recognition he believes he deserves as representative of most (albeit less than before) Christians. Thus, although there is nothing in the constitution that says cabinet must reflect representation in parliament, the early signs are that Aoun and his allies will push for a quarter of the ministerial positions.

¶13. (C) Add to this the inevitable competition between March 14 Christian leaders Samir Geagea and Amine Gemayel for the March 14 Christian cabinet positions and we conclude that it could be a long time before cabinet formation is finally complete. Geagea's Lebanese Forces (LF) and Gemayel's Kataeb each received five seats in the new parliament, with Geagea claiming three more independents in his bloc for a total of eight. Their fierce intra-March 14 battle for cabinet seats was a primary reason last year's cabinet formation process dragged on for six weeks. End comment.

SISON